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**“Imagining The Trans-Mediterranean Republic:
Algeria, Republicanism and The Ideological Origins of
The French Imperial Nation-State, 1848-1870”**

Gavin Murray-Miller

In August of 1857, runoff elections held in Paris confirmed the victory of five oppositional republican candidates to the Corps législatif, the parliamentary body that had served as a stronghold of conservative support for Emperor Napoleon III’s Bonapartist government since its creation in 1852. In histories of modern French republicanism, the election of *Les Cinq* has traditionally marked the commencement of the “republican renaissance,” a movement led by a new generation of lawyers, journalists and politicians committed to cleansing republicanism of its revolutionary ideology and fetish for political violence. In the last decade of the Second Empire, self-styled *jeunes républicains* (“young republicans”) touted a moderate brand of

republicanism that would, in time, come to provide the ideological foundations of the future Third Republic established on the ruins of the Bonapartist state in 1870. Scholars concerned with the origins of modern French democracy have frequently looked to the 1860s as a pivotal moment in the nation's political history, insisting that republican ideologues at mid-century successfully focused attention on key issues concerned with decentralization, citizenship and the defense of civil liberties to draw support from liberals frustrated with Napoleon III's authoritarian regime and, ultimately, make the idea of a republic palatable to French political elites.¹

If the details of the republican renaissance are well known, there remains another side to this story that is less familiar. As the ballots were being counted in August 1857, Jules Favre, one of the five republican candidates set to take a seat in the Corps législatif, surprisingly left the capital for the Algerian city of Oran to plead a case in the local *cour d'assises*, one of the French law courts set up in the colony to try criminal offenses. The trial in question involved Auguste Doineau, a captain in the Armée d'Afrique and commander of the Arab Office in Tlemcen charged with secretly ordering the assassination of a Muslim notable. Pleading his case before the Oranais court, Favre used the scandal to condemn the military regime and, by association, the imperial government, insisting that the *Affaire Doineau* exposed the authoritarian character of the colonial administration and its preference for personal power over justice and liberty.² "If

¹ For works on the origins of modern French republicanism, see: Jacques Chastener, *L'enfance de la Troisième République 1870-1879* (Paris: Hachette, 1952); François Goguel, *La politique des partis sous la Troisième République* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1956); Pierre Barral, *Les fondateurs de la Troisième République* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1968); Léo Hamon, ed., *Les républicains sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1993); Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and The Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); James R. Lehning, *To Be A Citizen: The Political Culture of The Early Third Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

² See: Jules Favre, *Plaidoyers et discours du botonnat* (Paris: Marescq Ainé, 1893), 1:467-484.

what occurred in Tlemcen is indicative of all the Arab Offices,” Favre boldly charged, “then it is necessary to eliminate or profoundly reform them as quickly as possible.”³

The tenor of Favre’s diatribe and the timing of his arrival in Algeria were not insignificant. With the entrance of *Les Cinq* into the Corps législatif set to give a political voice to republicans, it was essential to find issues capable of building an opposition platform and attracting reform-minded allies. Concerned with the progress of the nation’s “civilizing mission” being carried out in the colonies, Favre had come to Oran believing that Algeria could provide republicans with a possible forum for promoting their ideas and demonstrating their disapproval of the government. He even confessed that the ongoing debates over Algeria and the incessant grievances of colonial settlers held the potential of cementing a “common cause” between metropolitan democrats at home and disaffected Algerian *colons* across the Mediterranean.⁴ From the very beginning of the republican resurgence the Algerian question comprised a facet of republican debate and discourse, proposing a political strategy aimed at integrating colonial concerns into the broader issues of liberty and state reform championed by republican spokesmen on the continent.

Republican efforts to rally support in the colonies during the last decade of the Second Empire have largely been marginalized in historical accounts of the republican revival. In spite of the growing interest in French colonial history over the past two decades, limited attention has been given to the debates and discussions surrounding the subject of France’s empire before 1870. Perhaps more troubling is the dearth of scholarship examining the relationship between French republicanism and the colonies prior to the Third Republic. Historians have typically looked to the late nineteenth century or the period following the First World War when assessing

³ Quoted in Charles-André Julien, *Histoire de l’Algérie contemporaine: La conquête et les débuts de la colonisation, 1827-1871* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), 340.

⁴ Quoted in Pierre Antoine Perrod, *Jules Favre: Avocat de la liberté* (Lyon: La Manufacture, 1988), 184.

the ideology and practices that came to define a republican brand of colonial rule anchored in the promise of emancipation, modernity and the assimilation of non-European populations to French cultural norms.⁵ Comparatively little has been said on how the empire impacted French politics and culture prior to the Third Republic or how republicans drew upon pre-existing ideas concerning assimilation and the “civilizing mission” to outline their own imperial agenda.⁶ The schema explaining the creation of *la république coloniale* has rested upon the successive construction of universalized imagined communities that shifted from “the nation” to a French “imperial nation-state”—*La Plus Grande France*, or “Greater France”—in the post-war period.⁷

This supposed shift in the way the French community was imagined and reified is, however, problematic when applied to Algeria, a territory that was intimately connected to France by virtue of its proximity to the continent and sizeable settler population yet nonetheless inhabited by a Muslim majority. The ambiguous status of Algeria vis-à-vis the metropole prior to 1870 subjected it to both national and colonial discourses, suggesting the extent to which colonialism was already becoming an integral part of French political culture in the post-revolutionary period.⁸ Modern French republicanism came of age in a colonial world and it was, therefore, unsurprising that the nation’s colonial empire furnished republicans with a context for representing notions of universal citizenship and human rights central to their ideological

⁵ Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); J.P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism and The Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Raoul Girardet, *L’Idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* (Paris: Hachette, 1972); Jonathan K. Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria, 1930-1954* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 4-14.

⁶ Some notable exceptions include: Paul Robinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Sandrine Lemaire, Pascal Blanchard and Nicolas Bancel, “Jalons d’une culture coloniale sous le Second Empire,” in Lemaire, Blanchard and Bancel, eds., *Culture Coloniale en France de la Révolution française à nos jours* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2008), 96-109; Osama Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and The Civilizing Mission in Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

⁷ Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between The Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 15-17.

⁸ See: Jennifer E. Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011). Also of interest is David Todd, “A French Imperial Meridian, 1814-1870,” *Past and Present*, 210 (February 2011): 155-86.

convictions. Under the Second Empire, republican elites tactfully employed “the Algerian question” to highlight the democratic charade of Napoleon III’s government and gave support to demands for citizenship and national integration vocalized by settlers overseas. In placing Algeria at the center of debates on the nation during the 1860s, republicans crafted an identity for themselves as defenders of law and justice against Bonapartist despotism, arguing in favor of the universal and democratic rights that formed the basis of a French national-imperial community.

As a point of convergence for dual forms of national and colonial representation, Algeria offers valuable insight into question regarding how nineteenth-century Frenchmen reflexively understood concepts of nationality, citizenship and the relationship between the French metropole and its colonies. These issues first came to the forefront of national politics in 1848 when the Second Republic enacted a policy of territorial integration (*rattachement*) that extended citizenship to Algeria’s French settlers and permitted Algerian deputies to sit in the National Assembly.⁹ While Napoleon III rescinded these policies after the coup in 1851, republicans were well positioned to associate themselves with *colon* concerns over *rattachement*, administrative assimilation and civil rights during the Second Empire and effectively used these issues to articulate and refashion conceptions of republican citizenship. Reaching out to the colonies provided a means of representing and instantiating the isonomic principles central to the “community of citizens” venerated by republicans since the late-eighteenth century. Yet it equally exposed the paradoxes lying at the heart of France’s republican democracy. While partisans of liberty in Algeria and France spoke in the name of universal citizenship and equality, their envisaged community of citizens never intended to include Algeria’s indigenous Muslim

⁹ For works on Algeria and the Second Republic, see: Marcel Emerit, ed., *La révolution de 1848 en Algérie* (Paris: Larose, 1949); Benjamin McRae Amoss, “The Revolution of 1848 and Algeria,” *The French Review* 75:4 (March 2002): 744-754; Yvette Katan, “Les colons de 1848 en Algérie: mythes et réalités,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 31:2 (April-June, 1984): 177-202.

populations, as debates in both the colony and the Corps législatif during the 1860s would make clear.¹⁰

The formation of a trans-Mediterranean opposition movement during the last decade of the Second Empire encouraged perceptions of a national community extending beyond the continent, yet this new national imaginary was hardly the sole invention of metropolitan political elites. Colonial journalists and critics played an instrumental role in promoting the idea of a common struggle against tyranny spanning from Paris to Algiers and consciously drew upon liberal and republican ideas regarding state power, administrative reform and citizenship in framing their calls for a French Algeria tied culturally and politically to the continent.

Assessments of *colon* criticism have habitually overlooked the language of liberal-republicanism that informed settler grievances during the years of the Second Empire. The focus of attention has emphasized more salient themes of opposition to military rule, land access and administrative assimilation.¹¹ Yet to simply interpret *colon* criticism in stark terms of conflict between military and civilian rule fails to take into account the specific ways in which colonial activists shaped and cultivated an oppositional identity for themselves. Many colonial polemicists depicted their struggle in terms specific to the new liberal-republican opposition emerging within metropolitan circles during the 1860s and successfully tailored metropolitan ideas to the unique contours and problems of colonial society. While these efforts were designed

¹⁰ Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 14-16, 129-39; Dominique Schnapper, *Community of Citizens: On The Modern Idea of Nationality*, trans., Séverine Rosée (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 3-4, 12; Pierre Guillaume, "L'accession à la nationalité: le grand débat, 1882-1932," in Dominique Colas, Claude Emeri and Jacques Zylberberg, eds., *Citoyenneté et nationalité* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1991), 137-48; Jeremy Jennings, "Citizenship, Republicanism and Multiculturalism in Contemporary France," *British Journal of Political Science*, 30:4 (October 2000): 575-97.

¹¹ Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*; Charles-Robert Ageron, "L'évolution politique de l'Algérie sous le Second Empire," *De l'Algérie «française» à l'Algérie algérienne* (Paris: Bouchene, 2005), 98-134; Kenneth J. Perkins, *Qaids, Captains and Colons: French Military Administration in the Colonial Maghrib, 1844-1934* (New York: Africana, 1981), 19; Marcel Emerit, *Les Saint-Simoniens en Algérie* (Paris: Faculté des lettres d'Alger, 1941), 252-300.

to rally metropolitans to the *colon* cause, they equally served to place colonial grievances and the Algerian question within a larger framework of national concerns over state power, democratization and citizenship central to the metropolitan opposition.

By the mid-1860s, French politics was assuming a conspicuous trans-Mediterranean character, one shaped and elaborated within the realm of the press and print culture. Algerian journalists, whether by cultivating ties to influential opinion leaders or reformulating liberal-republican ideas within the context of colonization and the civilizing mission, directly and indirectly participated in debates on the French nation. The major metropolitan journals of the day commonly reprinted articles from Algerian newspapers while politicians kept abreast of colonial affairs and occasionally quoted from Algerian journals in public speeches.

Transportés—radical workers and republican opponents deported to the colony between 1848 and 1852—similarly played an instrumental role in disseminating liberal and republican ideas across the Mediterranean during the Second Empire, providing an important conduit between metropolitan political culture and Algerian settler communities.¹² The increasing exposure the Algerian question received in the press and the making of a common political discourse rooted in demands for decentralization, civic participation and the development of an autonomous citizenry traced the contours of a dynamic trans-Mediterranean public sphere shaped through correspondence, journalism and social networks linking France and Algeria within a national-imperial political culture. These various channels and networks would, over the course of the 1860s, contribute to Algeria's progressive entrenchments in metropolitan affairs and result in the creation of a republican state straddling the banks of the Mediterranean.

¹² Boyer, "La vie politique et les élections à Alger," in Emerit, ed., *La révolution de 1848 en Algérie*, 61; Annie-Rey Goldzeiguer, *Le Royaume Arabe: La politique algérienne de Napoléon III, 1861-1870* (Algiers: SNED, 1977), 114-15.

Studies on modern French republicanism and the origins of the colonial republic have minimalized the dialogue that took place between colonists and metropolitan politicians during the mid-nineteenth century. This oversight has favored a narrative largely stressing the primacy of metropolitan policymakers and elites while obscuring the significant role that settlers and colonial activists played in elaborating the ideas and practices that would eventually underpin the colonial republic.¹³ Retracing these trans-Mediterranean associations proposes a novel geographic and cultural framework for the study of nineteenth-century French politics and political culture. The circulation and exchange of ideas within a trans-Mediterranean context had a mutually transformative influence on democrats and reformers both at home and abroad. As colonial journalist and activists adapted the rhetoric and ideas of republican revivalism to their own program, metropolitan republicans and liberals revealed a willingness to envision the national community in new terms, demonstrating their commitment to democracy and extending the opposition movement into the colonial domain. It was through this confluence of diverse political strategies and objectives that the fundamental tenets and ideology of the colonial republic would take shape and crystallize into a policy of imperial expansion and domination consistent with the democratic values championed by French republicans.

The Press and The Struggle Against Colonial “Officialisme”

The emergence of a trans-Mediterranean political culture in mid-nineteenth-century France stemmed from the political realities associated with French colonization itself. Colonists had no direct political representation in the French government and, therefore, no direct influence over colonial policymaking. Subject to the authority of the Governor General and, ultimately, Paris and the whims of the Emperor, colonists protested against the lack of popular participation in the

¹³ The marginalization of the *outré-mer* narrative in national historiography has been addressed by Jean-Pierre Rioux, *La France perd la mémoire: comment un pays démissionne de son histoire* (Paris: Perrin, 2006), 131-33.

drafting and execution of Algerian policies. “The administration consults itself in lieu of consulting the country,” the prominent Algerian lobbyist Jules Duval charged. “It risks severely mistaking its views for those of the colonists.”¹⁴ The colonial publicist Auguste Warnier was equally critical of the government’s authoritarian attitude, complaining in 1865 that “not a single colonist is asked for the slightest advice on questions concerning the future of the entire country.”¹⁵ The colonial administration’s supposed disregard for the needs and interests of the settler community became a centerpiece of *colon* opposition as reformers held the government accountable for the slow pace of the colony’s economic development, the troublingly low emigration rates, and the consistent misuse of public funds for grandiose and impractical building projects in the major cities of the Tell Atlas region.¹⁶

If colonists could expect little sympathy from state and military officials, the same could also be said of metropolitan politicians and opinion leaders. In 1868, *Akhbar*’s Parisian correspondent chided the majority of deputies in the Corps législatif for the uninformed opinions and general disregard they revealed when it came to Algeria. “I do not fear I am going too far by claiming,” he reported, “that in the Chamber there are not ten deputies who are familiar with [Algeria] or have bothered to study it.”¹⁷ This disinterest similarly extended to national newspapers as well. “Practically no organ of the Parisian press seems disposed to discuss our interests,” journalist and republican *transporté* Wilfrid de Fonvielle lamented in 1860. “They assume that they are of no concern to the French public.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Duval, *L’Algérie et les colonies françaises*, 311.

¹⁵ Auguste Warnier, *L’Algérie devant l’Empereur* (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1865), 101.

¹⁶ For example, see: Joseph Guérin, “Le chemin de fer,” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 4 June 1866; A. Molot, “Les travaux publics et le budget,” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 13 January 1865; *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 30 July 1862; Henri Verne, *La France en Algérie* (Paris: Charles Douniot, 1869), 38; Joseph Guérin, “Da la nécessité d’attire une population européenne nombreuse en ce pays,” *Akhbar*, 11 May 1865.

¹⁷ *Akhbar*, 21 July 1868.

¹⁸ Wilfrid de Fonvielle, “A la presse française,” *L’Algérie Nouvelle*, 2 February 1860.

Unable to plead their case directly before the nation, colonists were obliged to rely upon metropolitan spokesmen to air their grievances, circumstances which necessitated courting public opinion and political allies through informal channels. This task, activists insisted, invested the colonial press with a specific mission and purpose. Journalists were obliged “to clarify public opinion and show things as they truly are,” Joseph Guérin, the Algiers notable and future mayor of Sidi Moussa, explained in 1865.¹⁹ Arnold Thomson, a regular contributor to the moderate *Akhbar*, was equally supportive of the role the Algerian press had in the colony, claiming the publicist was “to seek out and elucidate each one of the colonial questions and inspire thoughts in the diligent and intelligent part of the population.”²⁰ By 1868, the radical Émile Thuillier commended the efforts of his colleagues, remarking, “Algeria is recruiting new defenders each day.” Yet he was also careful to reiterate the ongoing mission of Algerian journalism, reminding that “to draw people’s attention, it is first essential that they understand [the colony].”²¹

The sense of unity and optimism conveyed by journalists often belied, however, a more complex reality. Censorship frequently made the hope of “clarifying” perceptions of Algerian society difficult. Colonial officials would fine or altogether suppress journals critical of the administration, imposing limits on the scope and tone of public discourse.²² The spectrum of opinion found in the Algerian press was, moreover, far from uniform. In addition to the official state organ, *Le Moniteur algérien*, the only fairly regular newspaper in the colony during much of the nineteenth century was *Akhbar* established in 1839 by Auguste Bourget. Bourget’s success was due primarily to his political flexibility and willingness to work within the acceptable limits

¹⁹ Joseph Guérin, “Pourquoi trembler?” *Akhbar*, 11 July 1865.

²⁰ Arnold Thomson, “De l’assimilation,” *Akhbar*, 10 November 1868.

²¹ Émile Thuillier, “L’Algérie au Corps législatif,” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 7 June 1868.

²² Taxile Delord, *Histoire du Second Empire* (Paris: Germer Baillere, 1869), 4:658; Clément Duvernois, *La Liberté de discussion: lettre à M. Levert préfet d’Alger* (Algiers: Dubos Frères, 1860), 5.

of public discourse set by the state without compromising the paper's overall independence.²³ More censorious journalists often chided Bourget for his moderation,²⁴ and comparatively short-lived papers run by reform-minded liberals and anti-Bonapartist *transportés* like the radical republican Thuillier considered it a duty to maintain an oppositional stance reflecting explicitly *colon* interests and opinions. Journals like the *Progrès de l'Algérie* and *Courrier de l'Algérie*—both of which tended to reflect republican attitudes—or Jules Duval's fiercely pro-*colon* *L'Echo d'Oran* were typically the most critical of the colonial administration, and official efforts to mute criticism only further encouraged hostility. As one observer remarked in 1868: “Should you want to commend an act of state, send your prose to *Le Moniteur* or *Akhbar*; if you want to vent your spleen, send it to the *Courrier*”²⁵

Ideological differences aside, colonial journalists collectively saw themselves as spokesmen for settler interests and as mediators between the settler community and metropolitan policymakers. As opposition to the government's policies grew during the 1860s, calls for “unity” and accord permeated journalistic discourse, prompting writers to publicize an identity for the European population inhabiting North Africa.²⁶ Critics hostile to the colonial administration frequently made their case for civilian government by blandishing the patriotism and industriousness of the *colon* devoted to “the prosperity of the colony, to the grandeur of France and to the progress of civilization” in Africa.²⁷ This image of the Algerian *colon* touted by polemicists tended, however, to obscure the diversity of a settler population consisting of aristocratic land owners, middling entrepreneurs and merchants, small-scale *agricoles* and

²³ Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Le Royaume Arabe*, 65-66.

²⁴ Clément Duvernois, *L'Akhbar et les novateurs téméraires: Lettre à M. A. Bourget* (Algiers: Dubos Frères, 1858).

²⁵ Charles Desprez, *Alger naguère et maintenant* (Algiers: Imprimerie de Courrier de l'Algérie, 1868), 297.

²⁶ Alexandre Lambert, “La pétition au Sénat,” *L'Echo d'Oran*, 12 February 1863; Jules Duval, “Pourquoi l'Algérie et les colonies n'ont-elles plus de députés?” *L'Echo d'Oran*, 9 July 1863;

²⁷ *L'Echo d'Oran*, 10 February 1863.

various insular immigrant communities.²⁸ *Colon* signified a cultural rather than an explicitly social category, personifying the idealized French colonists inspired by an ardent love of the *patrie* and a dedication to progress and conquest with “a pickaxe in one hand and a gun in other.”²⁹ A “pioneer of modern civilization” in the African wilderness, the *colon* became a familiar and salient image in newspapers and publications, providing an identity with which the settler community was expected to identify.³⁰

Praise for the resourcefulness and tenacious spirit of European settlers in Algeria often accompanied more pessimistic appraisals of the state and its excessive interference in nearly all aspects of public life. From the beginning of the French occupation, the colonial administration and its staff of civil engineers had spearheaded the various public work projects, urbanization initiatives and industrial ventures associated with Algerian modernization. Yet as various critics pointed out, these efforts could often be slow to materialize or incongruous with the practical needs of settler communities.³¹ Colonists habitually complained about state restrictions on land purchases and the persistent interference of authorities in the daily activities of settlers.³² During a visit to the colony in 1860, the dignitary Albert de Broglie opined that the values of “individual initiative” and the “spirit of enterprise” seemed feeble among the French settlers. Their “political institutions have,” he dismally concluded, “habituated [them] over the years to being governed, administered, controlled, supervised, and protected at all times and on all points.”³³ According to *Akhbar*, nine years later little had changed. “It seems Algerians can do nothing without the

²⁸ David Prochaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 11; Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Le Royaume Arabe*, 62-65.

²⁹ Joseph Guérin, “Aux Algériens,” *Akhbar*, 2 May 1865.

³⁰ M. Étourneau, *L’Algérie faisant appel à la France* (Paris: Grassart, 1867), 140, 180.

³¹ See: Joseph Guérin, “Le chemin de fer,” *L’Echo d’Oran*, 4 January 1866; Andrieux, “Langueur de l’Algérie, ses causes et le moyen d’y remédier,” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 25 May 1862; J-M. Junca, “L’Unité de juridiction,” *L’Algérie Nouvelle*, 25 June 1859; Arnold Thomson, “L’Agriculture algérienne,” *Akhbar*, 4 July 1867; A. Molot, “Les travaux publics et le Budget,” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 13 January 1865.

³² Clément Duvernois, “Question algérienne,” *L’Echo d’Oran*, 15 March 1863.

³³ A. de Broglie, *Une Réforme administrative en Afrique* (Paris: H. Dumineray, 1860), 137.

intervention of the government,” the journal claimed, “and this intervention is indispensable to the execution of projects.”³⁴

According to disgruntled colonists, constant bureaucratic oversight encouraged settlers to remain idle and reliant on the state, and the effects of this dependency were most pronounced in the settler communities outside the cities. In 1858, the young journalist Clément Duvernois sketched a depressing picture of rural colonial life, offering a tableau of poor farmers, barren fields, squalid towns filled with degrading cabarets and streets populated by children shirking work. Travelers who only visited Algiers and Constantine—cities that received the lion’s share of public funds and government attention—saw the newly laid roads and European houses and returned to France praising the administration’s progress. “But,” Duvernois countered, “if they even minutely examined the situation in the villages, they would lose the enthusiasm that had initially been inspired.”³⁵ Rural Algeria was characterized by isolation, fields dotted with small shanty farms, debauchery and penury, and this startling reality was the consequence of what Thuillier described as an egregious and ineffective “*officialisme*” smothering the colony.³⁶ “Here, where there is everything to be done,” Andrieux, editor and the *Courrier*, warned, “. . . centralization only serves to prevent everything from taking shape.”³⁷

Grievances over state policies were not merely complaints lodged against the colonial administration by angry settlers. The targets chosen by colons were strategic in nature and dovetailed nicely with the calls for decentralization emanating from prominent liberal and republican circles in the metropole. Critiques of centralization and demands for administrative reform were central components of the new oppositional discourse growing up in France during

³⁴ *Akhbar*, 13 June 1869.

³⁵ Clément Duvernois, *L’Algérie: Ce qu’elle est, ce qu’elle doit être* (Algiers: Dubos Frères, 1858), 144-45.

³⁶ Émile Thuillier, “Echos de l’opinion publique,” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 9 April 1868.

³⁷ Andrieux, “Langueur de l’Algérie, ses causes et le moyen d’y remédier,” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 25 May 1862.

the 1860s as political antagonists assailed the *étatisme* of the overbearing imperial bureaucracy and attempted to define a democratic polity capable of incorporating the majority of rural voters and transforming them into vigorous citizens.³⁸ By the late 1860s, attacking Bonapartist centralization constituted a veritable mantra for all self-proclaimed partisans of liberty, rendering calls for decentralization and democratization a key source of unity for an opposition movement comprised of various political and ideological persuasions. “It has become quite common,” the journal *L’Europe* reported in 1865 when summing up the mood of growing discontent in the country, “to blame the prefects, to incriminate them on the slightest acts, to envelope all of them in a general condemnation.”³⁹

Algerian critiques of centralization were intended to portray the colony as an example *par excellence* of the shortcomings and impediments of the Bonapartist state and underscore the commonalities linking France and its North African periphery. The *colon* battle cry of “war on administrative centralization and bureaucracy!” was a sentiment shared by like-minded republican and liberal thinkers on the continent and such declarations encouraged an oppositional language that elided the conceptual boundaries traditionally distancing the metropole from the colony.⁴⁰ Yet *colon* activists were not merely mimicking the familiar ideological discourse of their metropolitan counterparts. In ridiculing the “pernicious tradition” of centralization paralyzing the nation, colonial liberals and republicans consciously addressed prevalent concerns regarding state authority and the obstacles—whether real or imagined—believed to be detrimental to the health and vitality of colonial society. Frustrations over abortive state policies, economic underdevelopment and bureaucratic inefficiency stemmed from collective experiences

³⁸ See: Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*; Chloé Gaboriaux, *La République en quête de citoyens: Les républicains français face au bonapartisme rural, 1848-1880* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 2010), 106-233.

³⁹ *L’Europe*, 17 July 1865.

⁴⁰ Andrieux, “Le prolétariat et les indigènes,” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 4 May 1862

particular to Algerian society and colonialism, entailing that *colon* political ideologies were shaped by localized interests and circumstances just as much as by metropolitan political currents. Writing in 1858, Clément Duvernois expressed the popular *colon* sentiment that in Algeria the task at hand was “organizing a new country,” an undertaking that made decentralization and political reform all the more necessary.⁴¹

Duvernois was emblematic of the new tone and outlook pervading liberal and republican critiques of Algerian colonization under the Second Empire. The son of a French emigrant, he had received a formal education at the *lycée d’Alger* before entering into a career in journalism where he quickly established a reputation for himself as a trenchant political and economic analyst. A self-identified liberal belonging “to the school of M. Guizot,” as he once confessed,⁴² Duvernois attained notoriety through his persistent opposition to the illiberal and “arabophilic” policies of the colonial administration and his strong support for *colon* civil and political rights. In his opinion, the “principle of authority” could neither satisfy the needs nor meet the challenges required for Algeria’s social and economic development.⁴³ The state’s authoritarian temperament and pathological mistrust of civil autonomy had transformed colonists into little more than *fonctionnaires* commanded by imperious officials as individual initiative and productivity were “absorbed by the abstraction of the state” and colonial society floundered.⁴⁴ The way out of this morass was through administrative and political reform: the creation of a civilian government; representative institutions at the local and national level; and the development of a free and self-reliant citizenry.⁴⁵ “What is necessary to demand for Algeria is not that the state intervene,” Duvernois urged, “but, on the contrary, that [Algeria] be allowed a complete freedom of action in

⁴¹ Duvernois, *L’Algérie*, 92.

⁴² *Papiers et Correspondance de la Famille Impériale* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1871), 1:253.

⁴³ Duvernois, *L’Algérie*, 91.

⁴⁴ Clément Duvernois, “L’initiative individuelle,” *L’Algérie Nouvelle*, 8 June 1859; *ibid.*, iii.

⁴⁵ Duvernois, *L’Algérie*, ii, 91.

the efforts of private industry.”⁴⁶ Through his stringent attacks on the government, Duvernois ran afoul of the military regime and in 1860 his newspaper *L’Algérie Nouvelle* was suppressed and Duvernois imprisoned, prompting the fiery liberal to rail against the censorship policies that systematically undermined the freedom and integrity of the colonial press.⁴⁷

Duvernois’ contempt for centralization, his commitment to civil liberties and belief in the necessity of a free press were shaped and elaborated through his Algerian political engagements and fostered a liberal ideology informed through personal experience as much as political principle. Yet his liberalism was equally suffused with a Franco-Algerian nationalism stressing the complementarity of colonial and national politics. “Since the conquest,” he asserted in 1858, “political life in Algeria has been marked by numerous vicissitudes corresponding more or less to the events that have taken place in the metropole Algeria is not a colony. Nobody has considered it such for a long time.”⁴⁸ For Duvernois, the world of colonial politics was never distinct from the world of metropolitan affairs and, as the course of his career over the 1860s demonstrated, the two could often be interwoven in real and vital ways.

Through travel and correspondence during the 1850s and early-1860s, Duvernois situated himself at the nexus of an emerging trans-Mediterranean political culture by cultivating ties to prominent metropolitan opinion leaders such as Auguste Nefftzer, editor of the popular daily *Le Temps*, and the newspaper magnate Émile de Girardin.⁴⁹ Settling in Paris after the closure of *L’Algérie Nouvelle*, Duvernois contributed articles to *Le Temps* on a semi-regular basis between 1862 and 1864. Nefftzer, an influential publicist allied with the liberal-republican camp in the capital, openly gave his endorsement to the *colon* cause, deeming it “a movement whose

⁴⁶ Clément Duvernois, “Chronique algérienne,” *Revue de l’Orient* (Paris: Delavigne, 1858), 7:187.

⁴⁷ Duvernois, *La Liberté de discussion*, 5, 12.

⁴⁸ Duvernois, *L’Algérie*, 259, 239.

⁴⁹ See: Émile Girardin, “Civilisation de l’Algérie,” *L’Algérie Nouvelle*, 14 February 1860; Clément Duvernois, *Un suicide politique: lettre à M. Émile de Girardin* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1861).

importance cannot be mistaken.”⁵⁰ Armed with a major Parisian daily that reached a broad audience of educated, middle-class readers, Duvernois continued his attacks on the colonial regime unabated, apprising metropolitans of the issues central to Algerian colonization and urging a “new path” for French North Africa that would give a voice to the disenfranchised settler community.⁵¹ In the coming years, *Le Temps* increasingly dedicated greater attention to the Algerian question, whether by reprinting excerpts from the Algerian press, publishing articles written by Algerian polemicist or drawing attention to republican activities in Algeria and the Corps législatif.⁵²

Duvernois’ progressive entrenchment in metropolitan journalistic and political circles during the 1860s may have provided an opportunity for greater Algerian exposure in France, but it equally testified to the growing affinity between colonial and metropolitan political currents. Holding positions at various newspapers throughout the decade and fraternizing with political elites, Duvernois became a central figure in the liberal opposition by the end of the 1860s, winning a seat in the Corps législatif in 1869. During the final year of the Second Empire, he corresponded with republican Émile Ollivier to offer advice on the feasibility of liberal reform and decentralization.⁵³ As his attention turned increasingly toward national affairs, his views on centralization, the press and civil liberties lost their explicit Algerian connotations in favor of a broad platform centered on emancipating the provinces from Parisian tyranny and “developing the public spirit.”⁵⁴ “Without civil liberties, without the independence of the citizen, without the independence of the commune,” he warned, “a people enter into plain decadence . . . [and] each

⁵⁰ A. Nefftzer, “Question algérienne,” *Le Temps*, 19 February 1863.

⁵¹ *Le Temps*, 25 January 1864. Also see: *Le Temps*, 8 February 1862, 10 April 1863, 11 September 1863, 16 September 1863 and 31 December 1863.

⁵² For examples, see: Étourneau, “Lettres d’Algérie,” *Le Temps*, 23 September 1867; *Le Temps*, 2 October 1864 and 6 November 1868.

⁵³ For the correspondence, see: *Papiers et Correspondance de la Famille Impériale*, 1:244-268.

⁵⁴ *Le Temps*, 10 September 1863.

day the sentiment of responsibility diminishes in the individual.”⁵⁵ Despite the national scope of his envisaged reforms, the essential elements of Duvernois’ Algerian politic—the debilitating influence of centralization, the necessity of civil freedoms and the importance of individual initiative to social development—were unmistakable.

In his transition from Algerian journalist to metropolitan politician, Clément Duvernois exemplified the intersecting trajectories that were coming to define colonial and national politics in the nineteenth century. If *colons* sought to appropriate the oppositional rhetoric familiar to metropolitan political elites in the hopes of integrating Algeria into the larger debate on the nation taking place in France, Duvernois revealed that the “war on centralization” was never strictly contained within the boundaries of metropole and colony and could even resist and defy such dichotomies. In emphasizing shared political concerns and experiences, critiques of centralization effectively provided colonial reformers with a means of challenging Algeria’s status as a colonial dependency through the recognition of a common political life binding a trans-Mediterranean French community.

Algerian Municipalism, Citizenship and The Making of L’Algérie Française

If attacks on centralization offered a common discursive framework for expressing frustrations with the imperial regime, they equally held the potential of uniting metropole and colony in other ways as well. Much like liberal and republican critiques of centralization, colonial assessments of state power were not only used to instantiate accusations of tyranny levied at the imperial regime; they also provided a context against which desires for liberal reform and democratization could be articulated. The language and ideology that accompanied the republican renaissance of the 1860s reflected changing conceptions of democracy and citizenship held by French political

⁵⁵ Duvernois, “L’État VII,” *Le Temps*, 4 November 1863.

elites at mid-century. The collapse of the Second Republic and Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's use of universal manhood suffrage to buttress his authoritarian regime prompted liberals and republicans to reconsider certain core political beliefs, especially when it came to the obligations and responsibilities of a largely rural electorate in sustaining a democratic society.⁵⁶ As the republican Étienne Vacherot explained, as long as "the political education of a people" remained incomplete, democracy could not be "fully realized" in France.⁵⁷ "Democracy is not a natural phenomenon or the spontaneous product derived from the genius of a people or race," he contended in 1859; "it is, like all political societies, and perhaps even more than other political societies, the slow and laborious work of civilization."⁵⁸ Efforts to transform the mass of enfranchised French voters into active citizens engendered a turn toward what the historian Sudhir Hazareesingh has labeled "republican municipalism," a program aimed at promoting the nation's "political education" through participation in local government and politics.⁵⁹ The relationship between local liberties, civil society and citizenship outlined by young republicans provided, as Philip Nord has accurately noted, "the idea and . . . practice of democratic citizenship" that would remain central to modern French republicanism.⁶⁰

In editorials and political tracts, *colons* similarly drew broad parallels between the spirit of liberty, local autonomy and the practical work required for founding a prosperous and dynamic society in North Africa. Liberty, as founder of the *Courrier de l'Algérie*, Charles de Guerle, informed his readers in 1862, was "the only true principle underlying the drive and

⁵⁶ J. A. W. Gunn, "French Republicans and the Suffrage: The Birth of the Doctrine of False Consciousness," *French History*, 22:1 (March 2008): 28-50; Gaboriaux, *La République en quête de citoyens*, 99-132; Lehning, *To Be A Citizen*, 15-23; Claude Nicolet, *L'Idée Républicaine en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 138-57, 285-325.

⁵⁷ Étienne Vacherot, *La Démocratie* (Brussels: A. Lacroix, 1860), 353.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁹ Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, 233-305.

⁶⁰ Nord, *The Republican Moment*, 216.

progress of colonies.”⁶¹ “We ask for a greater freedom of action for our communes than in the mother country,” a *colon* petition submitted to the senate in 1863 explained, “because here everything has to be created and liberty is not to be feared, but is rather necessary in the struggle against the numerous obstacles that nature offers against the action of man.”⁶² Only free and autonomous individuals—self-professed “pioneers of modern civilization”—were aptly suited for the arduous task of founding a new and vigorous society in the colonial wilderness, and it was, therefore, unsurprising that reflections on liberty frequently translated into debates on the health and vitality of French colonial society *tout court*. In the opinion of one colonist, liberty was the most essential element in the growth and development of a settler community, warning that “without it, colonies wilt.”⁶³

Much as in the French metropole, calls for Algerian liberalization elicited demands for reforms at the local levels of government, nurturing a brand of Algerian municipalism consciously tailored to the particularities of colonial society. Such considerations were, however, hardly exclusive to the *colon* opposition and remained tied to larger questions of centralization and state reform raised throughout the years of Bonapartist rule in France. The Emperor himself briefly flirted with the idea of administrative decentralization in the late 1850s, authorizing the creation of *conseils généraux* designed to reduce bureaucratic oversight and give Algerian notables more influence in local affairs. Yet Bonapartist reformers were never warm to the idea of democratizing the colonial government. Despite the fact that local councils were established to deliberate on departmental budgets and policies, councilors were personally appointed by the

⁶¹ Charles de Guerle, “Un moyen de colonisation,” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 27 July 1862.

⁶² “Pétition au Sénat,” *L’Echo d’Oran*, 10 February 1863.

⁶³ *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 10 July 1862.

Emperor rather than popularly elected.⁶⁴ Frustrated over their exclusion from the Corps législatif, *colons* found exclusion at the local levels of the colonial government even more intolerable. Departmental and municipal affairs directly impacted the daily life and interests of settlers, especially when it came to the use of tax money. “Nation, department, commune,” the *Courrier* protested in 1865: “all are foreign to us and yet we must pay for everything these three councils vote on. Is that fair?”⁶⁵

Calling for further reform in 1862, Charles de Guerle stressed the importance of liberalizing the general councils in Algeria if the colony was to prosper and mature. “[We must] open our hearts and spirits to liberty through the free choice of general and municipal councils,” he implored, because it was at the departmental and communal levels that the decisions relevant to daily life were effectively made and implemented.⁶⁶ De Guerle’s entreaty reflected a widespread desire on the part of Algerian publicists in the early 1860s to combat the debilitating influences of state power by reinvigorating municipal life in the colony. Rather than constituting administrative entities akin to “companies and regiments” that knew only obedience, the Algerian municipalities would, the radical *transporté* Alexandre Lambert believed, be “reborn” through the participation of citizens and transformed into “vigorous unities sufficient in themselves.”⁶⁷ Liberty and individual initiative, rather than being abstract concepts, made up the cornerstone of any healthy society, necessitating greater reflection on the more intimate contours of colonial life and government as well as the local institutions which shaped them.

Under this program of administrative reform, *colons* attributed a particularly crucial role to the *commune*, the principal unit of French government. Much as the editor of the *Progrès de*

⁶⁴ Circular of 27 October 1858, *Bulletin Officiel de l’Algérie et des colonies* (Paris: Imprimerie de Schiller, 1858), 51.

⁶⁵ Montain-Lefloch, “Nécessité de la politique,” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 10 November 1865

⁶⁶ Charles de Guerle, “Un moyen de colonisation,” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 27 July 1862.

⁶⁷ Alexandre Lambert, “Les élections départementales et la décentralisation,” *Akhbar*, 16 June 1864.

l'Algérie, Amand Favré, claimed, the commune was the essential base of social organization, the “natural nucleus” of society. “Thanks to the commune,” he continued, “men coming from diverse points can undertake the apprenticeship of association to which they are destined and freely unite their efforts against the obstacles of nature.”⁶⁸ The senator and Algerian landowner Ferdinand Barrot readily concurred when addressing the senate in 1863, claiming the “municipal element” constituted “the first stage of all societies” and imparted the necessary education in self-governance and shared sociability without which society could not exist. In Barrot’s opinion, the municipality was “the first guarantee of interests, the first element of the spirit of association and solidarity.”⁶⁹ As the foundation of all social life, the commune provided an indissoluble link between the individual and the community, serving as the locale upon which social and commercial transactions came to shape common interests and associations. De Guerle proffered a familial metaphor in 1862, describing the commune as an “enlarged family.” “Municipal life,” he affirmed, “is what touches us at all points and all moments of our life.”⁷⁰

The central role attributed to the commune extended, however, far beyond the domain of commercial and social engagements. Since the 1840s, colonial policymakers and colonists alike had contended with the problems posed by Algeria’s diverse social and ethnic makeup and expressed concerns over the prospect of unity in the midst of such a heterogeneous population. The settler community comprised a mix of European nationalities which, when compared with the large *indigène* population consisting of Arabs, Jews, Turks and Berbers, constituted a minority of the colony’s inhabitants. The notion of *l’Algérie Française* was, in light of ethnic and cultural realities, an ideological fiction, yet one which nonetheless played a crucial role in both colonial policymaking and politics. *Colons* were among the strongest proponents of

⁶⁸ Amand Favré, “Notre programme,” *Progrès de l’Algérie*, 9 December 1867.

⁶⁹ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (Paris: L’Administration du Moniteur Universel, 1863), 2:251.

⁷⁰ *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 30 July 1862.

francisation—administrative and cultural assimilation with the metropole—and musings on the role municipal government and the commune played in colonial life and society remained closely tied to concerns over the threat posed by ethnic and national diversity.

Giving a speech before the *conseil général* of Constantine in 1865, the councilman Champroux expressed his support for communal organization in Algeria, believing it would mark a progressive step toward “a solid political and administrative organization” in the colony. It was not only advisable, but essential in his opinion, since the commune provided “the first link attaching [an individual] to a new *patrie*.” “In a colony composed of such diverse elements,” he maintained, “the commune becomes ever more necessary in suturing these elements.”⁷¹ Jules Duval shared a similar perspective: “the municipality becomes the principal *patrie* for the majority of inhabitants and on its horizon they concentrate their affections, activity, and ambitions.”⁷² The idea of *l’Algérie Française*, colonists claimed, must take root at the local level if it were to become a reality, and the commune was envisaged as the vehicle capable of shaping this French community on African soil.

If the “municipal principle . . . must penetrate into the heart and blood of the population,” as Duval anticipated, the hope of encouraging Algerian national integration among the settler community also dictated cultivating the necessary “public mores” that would attach individuals to a free and democratic society. For Duval, the solution lay in allowing greater liberties at the municipal level through local elections. Municipal elections would provide the “education of the citizen” in the colony, nurturing an attachment to the *patrie* through civic engagement. “Without elections,” he warned, “[the people] will only see themselves as a cog in the central

⁷¹“Délibérations du conseil general,” *Rapports sur le Budget et procès verbaux des Deliberations du conseil general* (Constantine: Veuve Guende, 1865), 175.

⁷² Jules Duval, *Les colonies et la politique coloniale de la France* (Paris: Arthur Bertrand, 1864), 456.

administration estranged from their affections if not their interests.”⁷³ In pleading his case for greater municipal freedoms in 1865, the liberal Montain-Lefloch argued that reform at the local level was paramount if colonists expected to obtain national representatives since it was through the commune that love for the *patrie* was born and the individual came to understand the “interests of the country.” In his final assessment, only “by proving that the fibers of the most vibrant patriotism runs in us as in the most humble peasant of France” would colonists win the right to elect deputies to the Corps législatif, and this could not be achieved without first liberating the communes from their administrative shackles and developing citizens.⁷⁴

As Montain-Lefloch’s critique revealed, a language of local government and municipal participation underpinned colonial demands for national integration and civilian rule. Opening up the communes and encouraging civic participation at the local level would generate, according to Arnold Thomson, an “awakening of the public spirit” in Algeria, cultivating an appreciation for democratic politics, patriotism and a shared sense of community.⁷⁵ “There is neither a true public spirit nor a true love of liberty,” de Guerle admonished, “where one does not take an interest in the activities of the commune.”⁷⁶ It was this “public spirit” which would, over time, become the lifeblood of an envisaged French Algerian society as the mix of nationalities and ethnicities scattered among the settler community came to see themselves as citizens united through shared interests and common aspirations. As Ferdinand Barrot put it in 1863, “the municipality [was] the mark of having attained the rights of citizens.”⁷⁷

Calling for democratic reform and the political rights enjoyed by French citizens in the metropole, Algerian activists nonetheless stood firmly against extending political participation to

⁷³ Duval, *L’Algérie et les colonies françaises*, 72-32.

⁷⁴ Montain-Lefloch, “Nécessité de la politique,” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 10 November 1865

⁷⁵ Arnold Thomson, “Élections communales et départementales,” *Akhbar*, 24 February 1867.

⁷⁶ *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 30 July 1862.

⁷⁷ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1863), 2:251.

Maghribi natives. French and European settlers made up a small minority in the midst of an imposing Muslim majority.⁷⁸ In light of these troubling demographics, *colons* clearly understood the problems that free elections would pose to European influence in the colony and the future of a French Algerian society if voting rights were given to Muslims. Addressing the issue in 1867, the liberal Arnold Thomson expressed his fears that Muslims, Jews and foreigners would vote along ethnic lines, warning that such a denouement would inflect Algerian politics with deep-rooted prejudices and hatreds.⁷⁹ One councilman in Constantine went as far as to claim that proportionate representation and democratic politics would result in the “the despotism of material interests over moral interests” since to enfranchise the *indigène* majority would unquestionably mean abandoning the civilizing mission that ascribed a leading role to French and European colonists in Algerian society.⁸⁰

Questions of political inclusion and exclusion became central issues of debate during the 1860s. It was undeniable that the political status of Algerian *indigènes* in the colony would have a direct impact on the question of overall national representation. Wary over the government’s growing nativist sympathies, Jules Favre decided to address the issue before the Corps législatif in 1870, candidly spelling out the problem enfranchising natives posed to Algerian national integration. If Muslims were allowed to participate in nominating deputies to the national legislature, he warned, France would be subject to an “invasion of the *indigène* element.” “If the *indigène* element should be represented,” he continued, “do you know how it will be? An *indigène* appearing in this body would be nominated by his co-nationals and would come to

⁷⁸ By the late 1850s, the European population consisted of nearly 190,000 inhabitants of which over 100,000 were French. Yet these numbers paled in comparison to a Muslim population of over two million. For the census data collected by the government, see: *Tableau de la situation des Établissements français dans l’Algérie* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1856-1858), 177, 188.

⁷⁹ Arnold Thomson, “De l’exécution du décret sur les élections,” *Akhbar*, 28 April 1867.

⁸⁰ “Délibérations de conseil général,” *Rapports sur le budget et procès-verbaux des délibérations du conseil général, Province of Constantine*, 404.

defend the principle that they defend on their soil.”⁸¹ Giving Muslims political power would not only threaten to undermine the French character of Algerian society; it would also give them a voice before the nation, imperiling national unity and infecting national politics with a divisive tribalism. The deputy Léopold Le Hon was of the same opinion and argued that since Muslims were not subject to the French civil code they could not claim citizenship or any of the rights associated with it, which included nominating deputies to the Corps législatif.⁸²

Colon activists and their defenders employed a language of liberty and citizenship to frame the Algerian question and link it to the cause of metropolitan reform, asking, as Jules Duval did, what “difference in nature” existed between metropolitans and colonists to warrant violating the supposed universal rights guaranteed to all?⁸³ In terms of Algerian Muslims, however, this difference was made plainly evident as accusations of native particularism elicited grave warnings of the racial and ethnic antipathies that would contaminate national politics were the “*indigène* element” to be given a voice. Republicanism’s rhetoric of universal and abstract rights was always conditioned by a discourse of national identification and the nation-state, equating nominally human rights with explicitly French rights.⁸⁴ As colonial reformers confronted the dilemma posed by Algeria’s ethnic and national diversity, the status of non-French and Muslim subjects could not escape the contradictions endemic to republican universalism, furnishing a justification for the exclusion of the vast majority of the Algerian population. Theorizing on the import and significance of colonial citizenship, *colons* and metropolitans rarely concealed desires for limiting the extent of political participation when it came to North African natives. From its conception, the idea of French Algeria rested upon

⁸¹ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1870), 2:536-37.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2:472.

⁸³ Duval, *L’Algérie et les colonies françaises*, 309.

⁸⁴ Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 14-16.

social distinctions between an elite French and Gallicized citizenry and a class of *indigène* subalterns bereft of political and civil liberties.⁸⁵

Issues over the nature of citizenship and the extent of enfranchisement brought a host of xenophobic and racist perspectives to the surface in the late 1860s, and these outlooks were never divorced from the fundamental question of Algerian national representation. Yet if metropolitans could rest assured that the integration of Algeria would not mean an Islamicized electorate, it was still doubtful whether the imperial state would sanction *colon* enfranchisement. If Algeria received deputies in the Corps législatif, these representatives would be vehemently opposed to the government's military policies. Why, therefore, would the Second Empire freely invite new members to fuel the growing opposition movement taking shape in the national legislature, one journalist speculated?⁸⁶ If Algeria was to secure national representatives in the metropole it was evident that this aspiration could only come about through the victory of the liberal platform endorsed by the Bonapartists' political rivals. The liberalization of the metropole was, *colons* inferred, intimately tied to the success of administrative reform and liberty in the colony, establishing the context for a trans-Mediterranean opposition movement oriented around a shared commitment to civic participation, decentralization and the rights of citizens. "Algeria will float on the wind, find itself year in and year out between different systems," opined one critic in 1868, ". . . until the day when a freer France gives more liberty to the colony and consults it on the important question of colonization."⁸⁷ The journalist Paul Capdevielle summed up the situation more robustly the following year in his appeal to settlers to support the metropolitan opposition. "Our plight is . . . intimately linked to that of France," he declared. "Its

⁸⁵ Michael Brett, "Legislating for Inequality in Algeria: The Senatus-Consulte of 14 July 1865," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 51:3 (1988): 440-461; Lehning, *To Be A Citizen*, 128-34.

⁸⁶ Arnold Thomson, "Nos affaires," *Akhbar*, 18 April 1869.

⁸⁷ *L'Echo d'Oran*, 11 January 1868.

triumph and its defeat will have here their inevitable corollary. Its interests are identical to ours and cannot be separated.”⁸⁸

Republican Politics and The Bridging of The “French Lake”

If *colons* tied their hopes of reform to the success of the liberal-republican opposition in France, this conviction said just as much about colonists’ disillusionment with the Bonapartist Empire as it did about the relationship between French republicanism and Algeria. Since the 1840s, republicans had revealed a growing interest in France’s new colony across the Mediterranean. France possessed, republicans contended, a sacred mission to spread the revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality, and such pronouncements easily translated into support for the nation’s civilizing mission in Africa. Republican newspapers throughout the decade encouraged France’s “moral conquest” of North Africa, providing the first indications of a republican colonial ideology centered on Algeria and the Maghrib.⁸⁹

Following the revolution of 1848, the Second Republic implemented a series of administrative reforms that recognized the three northern provinces of the colony as *de facto* French departments and permitted colonists to elect deputies to the National Assembly. These gestures drew broad support from settlers who, throughout the 1840s, had increasingly promoted a policy of Algerian *rattachement* with the French nation on the continent and served to transform the revolutionary élan of 1848 into a collective experience uniting metropolitans with their colonial brethren across the Mediterranean.⁹⁰ “Like our confrères [in Europe],” one

⁸⁸ P. de Capdevielle, “Le 29 Novembre!” *Courrier de l’Algérie*, 30 November 1869.

⁸⁹ Philippe Darriulat, *Les Patriotes: La gauche républicaine et la nation, 1830-1870* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2001), 59-73.

⁹⁰ Marcel Emerit, “L’esprit de 1848 en Algérie,” and Pierre Boyer, “La vie politique et les élections à Alger,” in Emerit, ed., *La révolution de 1848 en Algérie*, 14-24, 43-46; Amoss, “The Revolution of 1848 and Algeria”: 744-754; Sessions, *By Sword and Plow*, 316-21.

contributor to the *Revue de l'Orient* boasted that July, “we too have entered today into the domain of revolutionary realities.”⁹¹ This perception was only reinforced in the coming years as Parisians legislators authorized the transfer of some 12,000 French laborers to North Africa between 1848 and 1851. While the policy was conceived as a practical means of ridding urban centers of unemployed laborers and solving the troubling “social question” destabilizing the republic, *colons* welcomed the influx of new settlers needed to populate North African cities, assist with public works and contribute to the colony’s economic development and prosperity.⁹²

If the Second Republic’s Algerian policy nurtured a dedication to republicanism among the settler community, it equally served to make Algeria a pronounced theme within republican political discourse. As the republican deputy Charles Jacque Brunet explained when addressing the issue of Algerian colonization before the National Assembly, “Our revolution of 1848, whose principles are essentially pacific and fecund, can have for its theatre only a vast field of colonization on which to apply all the lively forces which ferment in our *patrie* [and] all the general instincts which lead France to become the apostle of civilization in the world.” Bruent’s cohort, the deputy Eugène Cordier de Montreuil, was of a similar persuasion, insisting, “Algeria is our *raison d’être* in this world for a people whose virtue has been otherwise extinguished and dead.”⁹³ Espousing a patriotic and nationalist rhetoric, republicans contended that Algeria occupied a special place in the 1848 revolution and the republic it had founded. It was the field upon which the ideals and glory of a new republican France would be realized as it fulfilled its destiny and constructed a monument to its culture and civilization across the Mediterranean. While the “republican experiment” (to use Maurice Alguhon’s phrase) inaugurated in 1848 was

⁹¹ J. d’Eschauannes, “Chronique d’Orient,” *Revue de l’Orient* (1848), 4:37.

⁹² Michael J. Heffernan, “The Parisian Poor and the Colonization of Algeria During the Second Republic,” *French History* 3:4 (1989): 377-403; Claire Salinas, “Colonies Without Colonists: Colonial Emigration, Algeria and Liberal Politics in France, 1848-1870” (Unpublished Dissertation: Stanford University, 2005), 104-40.

⁹³ *Le Moniteur Universel*, 20 September 1848.

short-lived and the subsequent Bonapartist regime restored the colony to military rule in 1852, the years of the Second Republic marked the beginning of a new national and political discourse focused on Algeria which would increasingly become integral to the language and ideology of French republicanism.

Although the *jeunes républicains* of the 1860s consciously attempted to distance themselves from the generation of *quarante-huitards* that had presided over the failed Second Republic, key spokesmen associated with the movement did exhibit a willingness to utilize the Algerian question to their own benefit and, in so doing, perpetuate a republican tradition. Seeking to build a broad opposition platform against Napoleon III's imperial regime, republicans highlighted the illiberal and authoritarian practices of the Bonapartist state and championed a more open and democratic political system. Accusations of Napoleonic despotism proved, however, exceedingly difficult for opponents to substantiate in light of the Second Empire's ostensible commitment to the ideals of the French Revolution and universal manhood suffrage. The brand of plebiscite democracy endorsed by the Bonapartists allowed the Emperor to appeal directly to the people over the elected representatives in the Corps législatif while officials used a variety of political strategies to manipulate mass democracy in local and national elections. Bonapartist proponents like the Duc de Persigny never failed to discredit the accusations of opponents by boasting that the government was in line with "the principles and ideas of the Revolution of 1789."⁹⁴

Rivals set on laying bare the hypocrisy and pretensions of the detested regime tactfully focused attention on Algeria and the colonies where numerous Frenchmen lived bereft of the political rights that citizenship guaranteed. In an address before the Corps législatif in 1861, Jules

⁹⁴ Duc de Persigny, "Discours sur le rétablissement de l'Empire," in Joseph Delaroa, ed., *Le Duc de Persigny et les doctrines de l'Empire* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1865), 89.

Favre made reference to the disenfranchised citizens currently living in France's North African colony and accused the Second Empire of reneging on its supposed democratic principles, declaring, "the right to elect representatives belongs to all Frenchmen who reside on French territory." He awaited the day, he continued, that the Algerian colonists could "march under the same banner" as their metropolitan compatriots and enjoy the common institutions and rights guaranteed to all French citizens. "Algeria and the colonies are French," Favre proclaimed amongst a mixture of applause and hissing from the assembled deputies, "and I ask why they are placed beyond this common right?"⁹⁵ "It is our principal argument, and we will not stop repeating it," Jules Simon stressed nearly a decade later, "that our co-citizens of the *oultre-mer* are, at this moment, deprived of their liberties."⁹⁶ Faced with such a flagrant violation of the nation's revolutionary ideals, oppositional spokesmen insisted they were obliged to speak on behalf of their silenced compatriots scattered throughout France's colonial empire, fashioning themselves defenders of "public opinion" and "unofficial representatives" of all Frenchmen suffering under the yoke of Napoleonic despotism.⁹⁷

Speaking in the name of disenfranchised Frenchmen not only offered opponents a means of contesting the Second Empire's apparent commitment to democracy; it also served to construct a political identity for the opposition and the *jeune républicain* movement. Republicans maintained that their commitment to the *colons* was not motivated by personal interest but rather by a dedication to the universal ideals of unity, justice and democracy. It was not the Algerian cause which the deputies explicitly sought to defend, Ernest Picard claimed, "but the cause of rights and justice which desires that all parts of France be represented in [the national

⁹⁵ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1861), 2:95, 99, 96.

⁹⁶ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1870), 3:11.

⁹⁷ See Léopold Le Hon's address in *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1870), 2:463; Jules Favre, *Discours parlementaires* (Paris: E. Plon, 1881), 3:141; Paul Robiquet, ed., *Discours et opinions de Jules Ferry* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1893), 335.

parliament].”⁹⁸ In construing support for Algerian liberty as a matter of conscience and principle, republicans sought to fashion a political identity for themselves rooted in respect for public opinion and liberal practices in contrast to Bonapartist tyranny. “You place force in the arbitrary while I put it in opinion and law,” Favre remarked sharply when confronting Bonapartist supporters in 1866. “You place force in the dictator while I put it in the regime of law.”⁹⁹ Such arguments naturally extended to support for representative government and the influence of public opinion on political decision making, with opponents using their status as “unofficial representatives” of the colonial citizenry to indicate the necessity of overall liberal reform in France.

Using the issue of Algerian representation to attack the democratic shortcomings of the imperial regime entailed, however, defining Algeria as part of the national body rather than a mere colonial appendage and affirming that Algerian settlers belonged to a French community extending beyond continental Europe. As the liberal Léopold Le Hon explained to his fellow deputies in 1870, “Algeria has a right to be represented [before the nation] and it will only see itself as completely French the day that its deputies come to sit amongst us.”¹⁰⁰ Republican opinion leaders readily concurred, envisaging a national community of citizens that encompassed France’s North African periphery and the settler population. “France has always wanted to attach itself to Algeria,” Favre claimed, “and it has understood perfectly that these two earths separated only by a French lake should be united.”¹⁰¹ With the rise of a small but growing opposition movement in the Corps législatif during the 1860s, Algeria quickly became a debate on the French nation itself. The senator Ferdinand Barrot was not mistaken when in 1863 he claimed,

⁹⁸ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1870), 4:529.

⁹⁹ Favre, *Discours parlementaires*, 3:71.

¹⁰⁰ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1870), 2:468.

¹⁰¹ Favre, *Discours parlementaires*, 3:549.

“The Algerian question is posed in daily polemics with an eminently national character.”¹⁰² If Bonapartist statesmen extolled the government’s respect for national sovereignty and democratic politics, republican and liberal deputies saw fit to correct this misrepresentation by re-conceptualizing the contours of the nation and using the plight of Algerian colonists to expose the contradictory claims and practices that buttressed Bonapartist power.

Raising the issue of colonial citizenship outfitted republicans and their political allies with a means of contesting the Bonapartists’ liberal and revolutionary identity. Yet such indictments rested upon the assumption that Algeria was a *de facto* component of the national body, an assumption which was hardly shared by all.¹⁰³ Efforts to portray Algeria as a symbol of Bonapartist despotism and hypocrisy prompted opponents to associate their own demands for liberty at home directly with the colonial opposition, reiterating the notion put forward by *colon* journalists of a common political cause linking France and North Africa. The issue of French liberty and the Algerian question were, critics urged, two sides of a larger national resistance movement against arbitrary rule and power. Professing his support for the liberalization of Algeria’s general councils in 1869, Favre tellingly inscribed the issue within a larger national context, claiming that subjecting departmental councils to free elections would realize “that true liberty which it is necessary to assure in Algeria as in France.”¹⁰⁴ “Algeria has constantly protested and protests still against personal power,” he maintained in 1870, “and in this it has followed the movement of France in its sentiments, thoughts and aspirations, and its heart has beat with ours.”¹⁰⁵ Much like Favre, Jules Duval asserted that the Algerian resistance symbolized

¹⁰² *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1863), 2:243.

¹⁰³ For example, see Eugène Rouher’s dismissal of rapid Algerian assimilation before the Corps législatif in *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1868), 15:59; for Algerian views on colonial exceptionalism, see: Alexandre Lambert’s article “Réponse à la lettre de M. Duval” in *L’Echo d’Oran*, 15 January 1863.

¹⁰⁴ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (1869), 2:403.

¹⁰⁵ Favre, *Discours parlementaires*, 3:767.

nothing less than “a new episode in the struggle between centralization and liberty” which had characterized French politics since the Revolution.¹⁰⁶

In making appeals to a common opposition movement spanning France and North Africa, republican critics gave substance to the idea of a trans-Mediterranean French community united through its resistance to tyranny and shared dedication to liberty. Having tailored the language and issues of the metropolitan opposition to the contours of colonial society, Algerian publicists had provided republicans and liberals in France with a context for integrating the Algerian question into the political program championed by the *jeunes républicains* and their allies. Yet if the ideas of the republican renaissance exercised an influence on how *colons* understood and conceptualized their own plight, their efforts to integrate colonial concerns into national debates similarly influenced republican discourse in vital ways. “Nationalizing” the Algerian question for the sake of immediate political objectives, republicans effectively de-territorialized French identity by inscribing it within a broader framework of rights, citizenship and emancipation. In taking on the Algerian question, French elites came to imagine the nation within new geographic and conceptual boundaries, envisioning an expansive French community of citizens transcending the territorial limits of the metropole. This vision would, in time, constitute the base of the “French imperial nation-state” and become an essential feature of the colonial ideology endorsed by the Third Republic.

Trans-Mediterranean France and Its Implications for French Republicanism

In June of 1869, *Akhbar* saw fit to comment on the growing momentum of the opposition movement spanning Algiers and Paris, asserting that an “uninterrupted current of people and affairs . . . [and] a constant exchange of ideas and sentiments” now existed between France and

¹⁰⁶ Jules Duval, *Reflexions sur la politique de l'Empereur en Algérie*. (Paris: Challamel Ainé, 1866), 175.

Algeria. “Are there really two countries?” the newspaper asked. “Are they not rather different members of the same body, receiving life and pulsating movements from the same heart?”¹⁰⁷

This question would be answered just over a year later when Napoleon III’s misguided foreign policy provoked a war with Prussia that brought down the Second Empire and paved the way for the establishment of the Third Republic. In October of 1870, republican leaders met with an Algerian delegation in Tours and willingly agreed to all the demands made by the *colon* representatives. The military regime was abolished in favor of a civilian administration, independent Muslim councils were suppressed and the settler community was granted the right to elect deputies to the National Assembly, effectively recognizing *l’Algérie Française* as an integral part of the French nation.¹⁰⁸ If the political language and discourse of republicanism had provided the context for conceptualizing a trans-Mediterranean French nation since 1848, the new republican leadership showed itself eager to translate this national imaginary into an administrative and political reality.

The realization of the trans-Mediterranean French republic created in 1871 was the product of the accord and consensus that had developed between metropolitans and *colons* during the years of the Second Empire. In adapting the rhetoric of liberal-republican opposition to the particularities of colonial Algeria, *colon* activists successfully managed to elaborate a common language and discourse through which to address administrative concerns and express their political grievances. The insistence on a shared political culture and experience lying at the heart of *colon* discourse furnished an intimate link binding metropole and colony, diminishing the conceptual gap between continental France and the French Orient that had complicated the issue of Algerian national integration in the past. More than simply complaints against

¹⁰⁷ *Akhbar*, 13 June 1869.

¹⁰⁸ Ageron, “L’évolution politique de l’Algérie sous le Second Empire,” 132-33.

authoritarian military rule, *colon* opposition drew upon and incorporated the language of moderate republicanism to construct a new national imaginary that encouraged a more expansive idea of the French community and reinforced the conception of *l'Algérie Française* central to *colon* aspirations. Goaded by political necessities at home, liberal and republican elites readily gave credence to this vision in an effort to build a common opposition front, endorsing the idea of a community of French citizens that, in time, would reinforce the notion of a French imperial nation-state supported by the Third Republic.

For a republic that conceptualized itself in both national and imperial terms, colonialism was, by necessity, an important facet of republican culture and state ideology. This consequence not only indicates the central role that France's Algerian experience played in the development of modern French republicanism, but equally challenges assertions that the colonial republic was a metropolitan enterprise directed by French political elites in Paris. Rather than a byproduct of modern French republican thought, republican colonial ideology constituted an integral component of the republican revival and the subsequent state it founded. The making of colonial republicanism was the result of a dialogue between metropolitans and the settler community as *colons* tailored republican ideas to fit the contours of colonial society. It was through this process of adaption and modification that the tenets and practical strategies guiding the republican "civilizing mission" would emerge and solidify into a brand of imperial rule and expansion consistent with republican values and principles. The tendency to marginalize peripheral influences in favor of a metropolitan-centered French history has often obscured these more nuanced and complex understandings of nation-building, French identity and republican democracy. Placing France within a trans-Mediterranean context marks an important step in

reconfiguring French cultural and political history within novel geographic and conceptual parameters.

If the Algerian municipalist movement and reflections on colonial citizenship foreshadowed the power relationships and mentalities that would structure the future colonial regime, it is also profitable to note that the Algerian question marked the beginning of French republicanism's troubling relationship with Islam and Muslim culture that persists in French society to this day. Recent scholarship focused on the relationship between France and Islam has addressed the challenges that the French republic faces in coming to terms with cultural pluralism, diversity and the impact of globalization.¹⁰⁹ Fears that immigration and especially Islam pose a significant threat to French culture and identity have become the principal caveat of right-wing nationalists touting such xenophobic slogans as "France for the French" and warning of the nation's impending transformation into an "Afro-Mediterranean country."¹¹⁰ These concerns are, however, hardly a post-colonial phenomenon and have their proper roots in France's experience of administering and assimilating the Maghribi populations that inhabited its North African periphery. Long before disputes over immigration and its threat to French identity were considered pressing subjects of national debate, French republicans stood opposed to what Favre described as the invasion of "the *indigène* element." If the generation of the 1860s and 1870s is considered the forefathers of the modern French republic, then it is evident that the

¹⁰⁹ See: Jean-Loup Amselle, *Affirmative Exclusion: Cultural Pluralism and The Rule of Custom in France*, trans., Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Herman Lebovics, *Brining The Empire Back Home: France in The Global Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006).

¹¹⁰ Michel Gurfinkiel, "Islam in France: The French Way of Life is in Danger," *Middle East Quarterly* (March, 1997): 19-29.

tension between Tricolor and Crescent marks a fundamental and sustained element of French republican thought and culture that has yet to be reconciled.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ I borrow this term from William E. Watson, *Tricolor and Crescent: France and the Islamic World* (Westport: Praeger, 2003).